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Hunters' Ability to Harvest Game in Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges Threatened by New Federal Rules

(Juneau) – The State of Alaska is strongly opposed to new regulations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that erode fish and wildlife management authority on Alaska's national wildlife refuges. Scheduled for publication on Friday, August 5, the new regulations override the state's sovereign authority to manage fish and resident wildlife in Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges.

"This is continued erosion of the state's authority to manage fish and wildlife for the benefit of Alaskans," said Bruce Dale, Director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation. "We are proud of our science-based, constitutionally mandated programs to sustainably manage habitats, predators, and prey to feed Alaskans".

"Although the Service itself conducts predator control on refuges, it just does not approve of state efforts to increase the number of ungulates available for food in Alaska," said Dale. "Moose, caribou, deer are important sources of natural food and food security for many Alaskans and cornerstones of the subsistence way of life."

The new regulations require that fish and wildlife be managed for natural fluctuations, superseding the state's ability to manage stable wildlife populations for subsistence and other consumptive uses under the sustained yield concept. Dale said the regulations, which affect national wildlife refuge landholdings of nearly 77 million acres statewide, will have significant impacts on Alaskans, especially those who rely on wildlife for food.

The regulations also contradict the state's role under agreements made in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act to manage fish and wildlife on all lands in Alaska. The regulations also limit public input for discretionary closures of activities on refuges and create a confusing third tier of regulations for resource users.

The Department of Fish and Game is reviewing the new regulations and will work with the Department of Law and Gov. Bill Walker to consider its response.

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